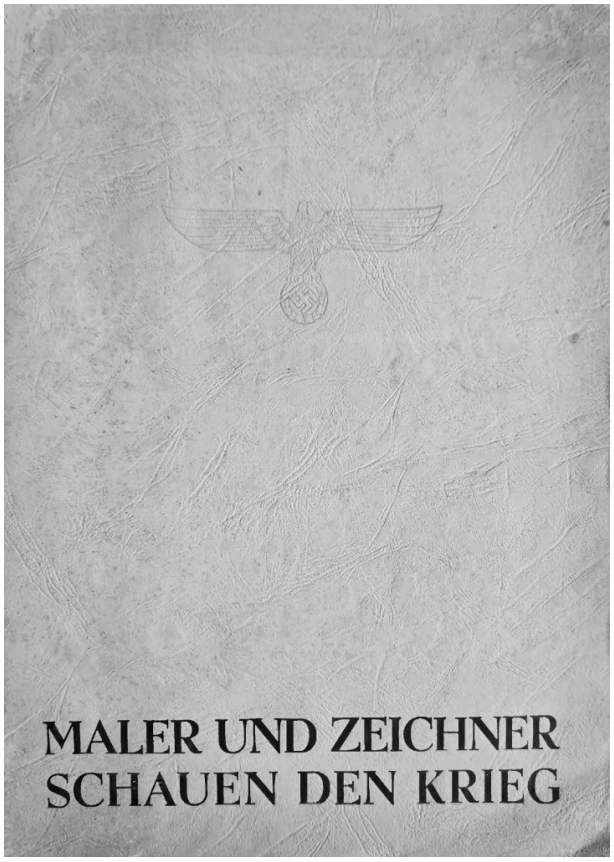
Painters and Draughtsmen Observe the War



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Artists as Soldiers
by War Correspondent Dr. Joachim Fischer

PK. — Amid the rich abundance of military experience and the vast scope of the task of documenting these events by the war correspondents of the propaganda companies, painters and draftsmen have one of the most rewarding tasks, for the richness of colors, the unsurpassed beauty of living things, the pervasive harshness, and the unique gravity of war offer an endless field for the palettes and paintboxes, the pencils, and the nimble fingers of painters and draftsmen.
In the course of the war, there were four soldiers in a propaganda company for whom the artistic depiction of the wartime experience became a prerequisite of their military service, four painters and draftsmen who have been capturing their comrades and their lives on paper and canvas for many months: there was Erhard Erdmann, who now lies in a cemetery in Bordeaux under a hot, cloudless sky; then there is Wilhelm M. Busch, draftsman and illustrator of the war reports written by his comrades; Rudolf G. Werner, the third, who as a painter is now experiencing his second war, and finally Max Mahlmann, the youngest, who has been working with the PK for only a few weeks, having come from the signal corps, where he had also witnessed the campaign.
Four soldiers, four painters and draftsmen, four hearts, four temperaments, four pairs of eyes—each pair seeing the world, the earth, the horses, the soldiers, and the war differently.

The most impetuous, the one who worked tirelessly, the one who created without restraint was Erhard Erdmann.
His passion lay with the horses: he saw them in front of the artillery pieces, he saw them beneath the riders, and he saw them in the rich variety of colors displayed in their coats, manes, heads, and eyes. Erdmann's sensibility was as rich as the colors at his disposal, and the intensity of his experiences was great: he accompanied the advance units on the front lines against the French positions at the Dreiländereck, followed the advance in the west, and on May 23rd, he was wounded on the heights of Stonne on the southern edge of the Sedan bridgehead amid heavy French defensive fire during the German expansionary attack.
No sooner had he recovered than he began working again, first in Flanders, then in southern France - until he fell in battle as a soldier.
The richness of Erdmann's work was immeasurable, and the strength of his heart touched the soldiers to whom he was a comrade: his drawings and watercolors make him unforgettable.

Wilhelm M. Busch's work is simpler and more decisive, and his heart, full of cheerfulness, is captured in the richness of his experiences, for he possesses the passionate enthusiasm and the obsession of the diligent, the unwavering; he strives for fresh, rich movement, the authenticity of experience, the moment, and the essence of a soldier's existence.
His love, too, also belongs to horses, but his horses are not the subject; rather, they accompany the military scenes, and the rider, the gunner—he depicts them with their horses.
The combat action, however—the hand-grenade thrower, the machine-gunner, the marching soldier, the advancing flamethrower, the sapper, the comrades rescuing a wounded man, advancing howitzers, a messenger on horseback, a soldier on leave surrounded by children—these are the drawings that Busch creates with passion, bringing them forth from the depths of his heart.

Busch is the illustrator, the press cartoonist, the war artist who, drawing from the present situation, from the fleeting experience, from the intensity of the moment of battle, creates, produces, crafts, and draws images in a way that only those obsessed with their art and mission can work.

Rudolf G. Werner, however, works in a more composed and confident manner, with the assurance that comes from experience: he is the eldest, the senior artist, who is already experiencing his second war and paints his pictures from this experience.
He is able to capture the rich colors of the Flemish landscape; he possesses the measured calm of quiet contemplation, and—what distinguishes him most—he has the confidence that comes from the equanimity of having lived through two wars.
The young painter, who painted in the East during the First World War and who is now, as a proven and already famous artist, painting the Second World War, draws strength from the many, many works he has created over four decades.
While here, Werner painted the churches along the Somme, the cities of Flanders, and the markets and town halls of the Hanseatic cities on the Scheldt, in the quiet of last winter, he also painted scenes from the previous war.
The heavy artillery crossing the makeshift bridge reflects the equanimity of his works, which, through observation and representation, reveal a controlled movement—the painted assurance of a soldier's heart.

The youngest, Max Mahlmann, experienced the war and the campaign with the Nebeltruppe[1], and only now is he painting with the PK - still, however, he throws himself into his work with intensity.
He wants to paint the world from top to bottom, from front to back; he possesses the enthusiasm of youthful zeal, which he has no intention of shedding.
He pours out the colors, and he knows no restraint, nor does he wish to know any; the richness of the colors, which have not yet yielded to his control, compels him to paint with intensity and unbridled passion, and his paintings were created in this fervor - thus do they seek to be understood through this very intensity.

Four hearts, four soldiers: four ways of experiencing life that seek nothing more than to reflect the military world in which they live.
In this way, the painters and draftsmen fulfill their duty as soldiers; for them, however, it is also the highest honor that an artist can receive today, in a war such as this, and proving this is the goal that the PK seeks to achieve by publishing a portfolio of artwork such as this one.

[1] A specialized unit in the German Wehrmacht that worked with chemical warfare, though during the Second World War they mostly became known for operating the "Nebelwerfer", a smoke grenade launcher. - The Translator

Wilhelm M. Busch, PK

The rider’s figure: carefully, the rider reaches the remains of the barricade, for in debris and beams, in burning houses, somewhere out there, the enemy lies in wait.

Erhard Erdmann, PK

Gunners at the howitzer: with a steady hand, Erdmann's quick sketches always captured the essential and the important.

Erhard Erdmann, PK

The fallen soldier: his comrades from the shock troop carry the dead man back.
As if Erdmann had foreseen his own early death, this became the best drawing he had ever created as a soldier.

Erhard Erdmann, PK

A battery advancing on the Western Front: these quick sketches clearly convey the sense of anticipation that has gripped both man and beast here.

Erhard Erdmann PK

Artillery in the village: with confident assurance, Erhard Erdmann filled his sketchbooks, always capturing the essentials.

Rudolf G. Werner, PK

The Cathedral of Abbeville: amid the chaos of rubble, the church of this town on the Somme stands unscathed.

Max Mahlmann, PK

Middelburg: this pen-and-ink drawing illustrates the barren wasteland of the cleared rubble field that was once the city center.

Wilhelm M. Busch, PK

Oberfeldwebel L.: the determination, courage, and inner composure of this engineer are depicted here with compelling clarity.

Wilhelm M. Busch, PK

Reserve horses: the riders are down in the heat of battle, and their horses are quickly brought to cover.

Rudolf G. Werner, PK

Heavy artillery crosses a makeshift bridge.

Wilhelm M. Busch, PK

Cavalry reconnaissance squad on the river Scheldt.
The horses' snorting, the riders' palpable tension in the face of the enemy's immediate proximity—that is the essence of such an illustrative drawing.

Rudolf G. Werner, PK

Dunkirk: one of the rows of houses in the city that saw the fiercest fighting during the Western Campaign.

Rudolf G. Werner, PK

Cassel: here, the Flemish countryside stretches far and wide in all its healthy fertility, and the sea can be glimpsed through the silvery haze.

Wilhelm M. Busch, PK

Infantry assault squad on the attack, in a fraction of a second after the hand grenades flew from their hands.

Max Mahlmann, PK

Middelburg: this Zeeland city, located not far from Vlissingen, bears numerous traces of fierce fighting.

Max Mahlmann, PK

Middelburg: the church tower stands alone, rising from the ruins of the city, which was severely damaged by the war.